

Week Ending Friday, December 7, 2007

The President's Radio Address

December 1, 2007

Good morning. Next week, Congress returns from its Thanksgiving recess. Members are coming back to a lot of unfinished business. And the clock will be ticking because they have only a few weeks to get their work done before leaving again for Christmas.

Congress must address four critical priorities. First, Congress needs to pass a bill to fund our troops in combat. Second, Congress needs to make sure our intelligence professionals can continue to monitor terrorist communications so we can prevent attacks against our people. Third, Congress needs to pass a bill to protect middle class families from higher taxes. And fourth, Congress needs to pass all the remaining appropriations bills to keep the Federal Government running.

Congress's first priority should be to provide the funds and flexibility to keep our troops safe and help them protect our Nation. Beginning in February, I submitted detailed funding requests to Congress to fund operations in the war on terror. Our military has waited on these funds for months. The funds include money to carry out combat operations against the enemy in Afghanistan and Iraq. They include money to train the Afghan and Iraqi security forces to take on more responsibility for the defense of their countries. And they include money for intelligence operations to protect our troops on the battlefield.

Pentagon officials recently warned Congress that continued delay in funding our troops will soon begin to have a damaging impact on the operations of our military. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates has already notified Congress that he will transfer money from accounts used to fund other activities of the military services to pay for current operations in Iraq and Afghanistan—and no more money can be moved. So he has di-

rected the Army and Marine Corps to develop a plan to lay off civilian employees, terminate contracts, and prepare our military bases across the country for reduced operations. Military leaders have told us what they need to do their job. It is time for the Congress to do its job and give our troops what they need to protect America.

Another priority Congress must address is the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, or FISA. FISA provides a critical legal framework that allows our intelligence community to monitor terrorist communications while protecting the freedoms of the American people. Unfortunately, the law is dangerously out of date. In August, Congress passed legislation to help modernize FISA. That bill closed critical intelligence gaps, allowing us to collect important foreign intelligence. The problem is, this new law expires on February 1st, while the threat from our terrorist enemies does not.

Congress must take action now to keep the intelligence gaps closed and make certain our national security professionals do not lose a critical tool for keeping America safe. As part of these efforts, Congress also needs to provide meaningful liability protection to those companies now facing multibillion dollar lawsuits only because they are believed to have assisted in the efforts to defend our Nation following the 9/11 attacks.

Congress's third priority should be to fix the Alternative Minimum Tax. The AMT was designed to ensure that the wealthy paid their fair share of taxes. But when Congress passed the AMT decades ago, it was not indexed for inflation. As a result, the AMT's higher tax burden is creeping up on more and more middle class families. If Congress fails to pass legislation to fix the AMT, as many as 25 million Americans would be subject to the AMT. On average, these taxpayers would have to send an extra \$2,000 to the IRS next year. This is a huge tax increase

that taxpayers do not deserve and Congress must stop.

Finally, Congress has important work to do on the budget. One of Congress's most basic duties is to fund the day-to-day operations of the Federal Government. Yet we are in the final month of the year, and Congress still has work to do on 11 of the 12 annual spending bills. Congressional leaders are now talking about piling all these bills into one monstrous piece of legislation, which they will load up with billions of dollars in earmarks and porkbarrel spending.

This is not what Congressional leaders promised when they took control of the Congress at the start of the year. In January, one congressional leader declared, "No longer can we waste time here in the Capitol, while families in America struggle to get ahead." He was right. Congressional leaders need to keep their word and pass the remaining spending bills in a fiscally responsible way.

The end of the year is approaching fast, and Americans are working hard to finish up their business. Yet when it comes to getting its business done, Congress is only getting started. Members of Congress now have only a few weeks left before they head home for the holidays. Before they do so, I urge them to do their job: fund our troops; protect our citizens; provide taxpayers relief; and responsibly fund our Government.

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 7:30 a.m. on November 30 in the Cabinet Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on December 1. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on November 30 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

Remarks on Congressional Action on the Legislative Agenda

December 3, 2007

Good morning. Congress returns from its 2-week Thanksgiving break today. They have just 2 weeks to go before they leave town again. That's not really a lot of time to squeeze in nearly a year's worth of unfinished business.

In fairness, Congress was not entirely out over the past 2 weeks. In a political maneuver designed to block my ability to make recess appointments, congressional leaders arranged for a Senator to come in every 3 days or so, bang a gavel, wait for about 30 seconds, bang a gavel again, and then leave. Now, under the Senate rules, this counts as a full day. If 30 seconds is a full day, no wonder Congress has got a lot of work to do.

Congress needs to start by passing a bill to fund our troops in combat. Beginning in February, I submitted detailed funding requests to Congress to fund these operations in the war on terror. Yet some in Congress are withholding this funding because they want to substitute their judgment for that of our military commanders. Instead of listening to the judgment of General Petraeus, they are threatening to withhold money he needs unless they can mandate an arbitrary date of withdrawal.

This month, more of our troops will return home as a result of the success we're seeing in Iraq. People are coming home. For Congress to insist on setting an arbitrary date for withdrawal would put the gains General Petraeus and our troops have made in danger—and that would threaten the security of our country. It's unconscionable to deny funds to our troops in harm's way because some in Congress want to force a self-defeating policy, especially when we're seeing the benefits of success.

Secretary Gates and other senior Pentagon officials say the delay in our funding will mean this for our military: Unless Congress acts, the Defense Department will soon be required to begin giving layoff notices to about 100,000 civilian employees. Unless Congress acts, the military task force developing ways to better detect and protect our troops from roadside bombs will run out of money by early next year. Unless Congress acts, the Army will run out of operations and maintenance money in February. Unless Congress acts, the Marine Corps will run out of similar funds in March.

Earlier this year, congressional leaders were trying to impose conditions on funds because they said our strategy in Iraq was not working. We changed our strategy, and